

On Reformed Piety

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Introduction

What is Reformed piety? Or is there such a thing as Reformed piety, as distinct from Evangelical piety? For those of us who do not identify as "Evangelicals," and that even before the term has become politicized during and after the election of US President Donald Trump, we do see a difference between Reformed piety and Evangelical piety. We do this, not out of a blind following of tradition, but because of what we see as being taught in Scripture and in light of the implications of Scripture.

It might be charged that such a statement in itself is schismatic in nature. In response, it must be said that we do not seek to break fellowship, but rather we seek to be truthful, and not pretend that there is fellowship and unity where none actually exist. Is it truthful to claim unity when in reality unity of praxis does not exist? Are we to be like the crowd marveling at the Emperor's (non-existent) new clothes? So likewise, the charge of division and schism presupposes what I explicitly deny, and thus the charge is vacuous.

Where then do I see Reformed piety as being distinct from Evangelical piety? I see Reformed piety as distinct from Evangelical piety in the following areas:

1. The priority aspects in Christianity
2. Views on Bible and Tradition
3. Views on the Means of Grace
4. Views on the Church
5. Views on the Moral Law and especially the Fourth Commandment
6. Views on worship

As we move towards comparing and contrasting Reformed piety with Evangelical piety, we must first define these two sides. After all, both the terms "Reformed" and "Evangelical" have been used and understood in many different ways by many different people. Some have used the term "Reformed" to refer to the followers of Karl Barth, but for those who are actually Reformed, such an association with the founder of Neo-Orthodoxy is extremely repugnant, to say the least. And others have used the term "Evangelical" to refer to those who anyone who claim that their faith is very important in their lives. Or, in a very misleading and offensive move, it is used to refer to the subset of white Christian Americans who voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 US elections. Suffice is it to show that if these two sides are not clearly defined, comparing and contrasting their respective pieties is next to impossible.

Defining Evangelicalism

What is an "Evangelical," and thus what is "Evangelicalism"? Historically, a claim can be made that "evangelical" refers to all Protestant Christians who believe, like Luther, that justification is by faith alone (*Sola Fide*), since Lutherans were first called "evangelicals" (German *evangelische*) as they were focused on the Gospel of free grace. However, words and the connotation of words change over time. At least in the English-speaking world, Lutherans are called "Lutherans." The term "evangelical" in English parlance came to denote a trans-denominational movement that begun during the time of the 18th century First Great Awakening. Prior to the First Great Awakening, each denomination and church body did its own thing and generally none of them worked together. During and after the First Great Awakening, many Christians who believed in the Gospel had decided that denominational differences were not worth fighting over to the point of non-cooperation in ministry, and therefore there is a need to join together for the proclamation of the Gospel. We must recognize that, prior to the First Great Awakening, the state of Protestant Christianity is seen in its various confessional traditions (e.g. Presbyterian, Anglican, Congregationalist, Dutch Reformed, Swiss Reformed, Lutheran etc.), with each tradition proclaiming itself to be the visible representation of the true church in its particularly locality, and all other local churches are to join her or be guilty of schism.

Evangelicalism therefore must be seen as both a creature and a creation of the First Great Awakening. Evangelicalism must likewise partake of some elements of the trans-denominational perspective of the leaders of the First Great Awakening, and all subsequent evangelical revivals. Evangelicalism therefore cannot be reduced to merely a doctrinal standpoint, but it is rather a social and religious phenomenon. It is not enough to ask what are the *doctrines* all Evangelicals hold to, but also to ask what the practices of the leaders of historical Evangelicalism are.

In this light, British historian David W. Bebbington, in his seminal work *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* gives us four points to describe Evangelicalism (both Old and New).¹ Known as the "Bebbington Quadrilateral," these four points are: Conversionism (a focus on the necessity of each person to individually turn to Christ in faith for salvation), Activism (a commitment to participate with God in his saving mission in the world), Biblicism (a devotion to the Bible as the Word of God written for all of faith), and Crucicentrism (a focus on Jesus Christ and the substitutionary atonement of Christ for sins).² Academia by and large has agreed with Bebbington's four pillars of Evangelicalism, even though Bebbington's insights have for the most part yet to filter down to the churches.

The Bebbington Quadrilateral however has to be modified in light of the differences between the churches before and after the First Great Awakening. The first pillar, Conversionism, has to be modified to "a focus on the necessity of each person to individually turn to Christ in faith for salvation, with the necessity of a recollection of a personal conscious experience in doing so." The reason for this modification is that Evangelicalism has always rejected the notion of regenerate covenant children being

¹ David W Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1989)

² Bebbington, 5-17

raised in the faith, but who have not felt a single day apart from Christ, and whose lives have not been filled with great spiritual experiences. That was why the congregationalists in Puritan New England had trouble with the spiritual lives of the second and third generation puritans to the extent that Solomon Stoddard (Jonathan Edwards' grandfather) instituted the Halfway Covenant. The New England Puritans had developed an imbalanced experimental Christianity whereby believers are to recount some spiritual experience wherein they have trusted Christ for their salvation.³ Now, this was not yet the emotional decisionism of Charles Finney in the Second Great Awakening, for believers were not asked to produce a **specific** conversion experience. However, evidences of spiritual life were to be sought in having some form of crisis or crises resulting in spiritual conversion to God. The half-way covenant came about because so many second and third generation Puritans did not possess that crisis-faith experience and therefore were not admitted into church membership and the Lord's Supper, despite how orthodox they were in their profession of faith. What happens when these non-communicant members desired to present their children for baptism? The half-way covenant was Stoddard's way of promoting a "half-way" whereby these second and third generation Puritans could be admitted to the Lord's Supper and have their children baptized if they were orthodox in doctrine and not scandalous in behavior, even though they were not considered full members of the church (officially "non-communicant members" who nevertheless partake of the sacrament of baptism!)

Jonathan Edwards, as one of the major leaders of the First Great Awakening, ultimately chose to reject the Halfway Covenant which his grandfather had instituted. Edwards rejected the Halfway Covenant not by accepting that covenant children might not have a radical faith experience, but rather by biting the bullet and insisting that covenant children without a faith experience should be regarded as unbelievers. Thus, one can be orthodox in doctrine and godly in life, but if a conversion experience cannot be shown, he is to be regarded as a heathen! It is only a matter of time before the conversion experience became a conversion decision experience, which Charles Finney popularized in his anxious bench, and Billy Graham with his altar call.

The first pillar of Evangelicalism, Conversionism, is thus to be modified to reflect the necessity of a conversion experience. The Old Evangelicalism, the Evangelicalism of the First Great Awakening, only insisted on some intense spiritual experience sometime in one's life, and is therefore more orthodox than the experience called for in Finney's anxious bench and Graham's altar call. Yet for both Old and New Evangelicalism, conversion experience, and **spiritual experiences** in general, are considered vital for a genuine Christian life, apart from which a person no matter how orthodox and godly is considered spiritually dead.

The second pillar of the Bebbington Quadrilateral, Activism, seems to be something that does not actually distinguish Evangelicalism as a separate movement, but rather it is meant to emphasize one major focus of Evangelicalism. In a certain sense, it seems that Evangelicals of any kind are merely obeying the command of Scripture, which calls us to

³ Baird Tipson, "New England Puritanism," in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Religious Experience* (3 volumes; New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 470

do good works (Eph. 2:10), at it is stated that "faith without works is dead" (c.f. Jas. 2:20). Also, Evangelicals note the Great Commission given for sharing of the Gospel in Acts 1:8, in which we are all called to be a witness for Christ wherever we are, spreading the message of salvation to all and sundry. Thus, this pillar of the Bebbington Quadrilateral does not seem to be a particular distinctive of Evangelicalism, or does it?

We would all certainly agree that the Scriptures teach that good works are necessary for Christian living (not for salvation), and that a "faith" that works wickedness is not really faith. But in the translation of good intentions to its application to society, to what extent should the church be actively taking a stand on various social ills? Here we see how activism has shifted ever so slightly the focus concerning good works. Historically, the teaching of good works and its application to society had always been rather specific. No doubt the largely agrarian nature of much of medieval and early modern European societies aided the direct application of Israel's civil laws to the context of their times. With the advent of the Industrial Age however, the rapid changes in society have made Israel's civil laws less applicable. As Evangelicalism began with the First Great Awakening, along with the revival came a renewed interest in dealing with the problems of early modern society. Unfortunately, there is no obvious blueprint in Scripture for how that is to be done in a modern context. Christians were left with a text that seemed dated, and many did not really wrestle with how to derive sound general principles that are both biblical and applicable to their times. Instead, Christianity intellectual thought became focused on the "spiritual," while Enlightenment philosophy permeated all other fields.

Evangelical Activism thus become tied with expressing the biblical command to do good and to witness for the Gospel. And in this command to do good, the failure to adequately wrestle with the discrepancy between the ancient and modern world has resulted in an activism that is very much informed by the unbelieving world and her ideas (Zeitgeist). Therefore, in the modern era, Evangelical Activism has been typically split into left-wing and right-wing movements, depending on which movement is currently in vogue among Evangelicals. In a politicized era like 21st century America, that means that Evangelical Activism has become highly political, either on the right or on the left, as opposed to a faith that will only speak where the Scriptures speak and keep silent where the Scriptures are silent. Therefore, we have both the "Moral Majority" in late 20th century America (right-wing), and the "Evangelical Left," of which Jim Wallies of Sojourners was one such prominent figures, both of them calling themselves Evangelicals. And in the early 21st century, we have the nationalist Trump supporters on the "right" and the Social Justice Warriors and Critical Race Theorists on the Left.

Bebbington's pillar of Activism, in light of the social history of Evangelicalism, therefore needs to be modified. Bebbington has defined it as "a commitment to participate with God in his saving mission in the world." But in light of Evangelicalism's history, activism should be modified to be "a commitment to participate with God in doing good according to the world's current social notions of doing good, and to witness for God in a way that seems right."

The third pillar of the Bebbington Quadrilateral, Biblicism, sounds like a lofty view of Scripture. However, in practice, it becomes a view that Scripture is the only authority with a corresponding rejection of all other authorities for the Christian faith. Thus, Biblicism is the Bible only (*Solo Scriptura*), as opposed to the Reformation slogan of Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*). Biblicism is the idea that anyone just need to read the Bible only and the authority of creeds and confessions should be rejected since these are external to the Bible. Thus, any appeal to creeds and confessions, and definitely tradition, is rejected by biblicists as a rejection of the Bible's authority. Whereas the Reformation slogan is meant to focus on the Bible as the ultimate authority, without a rejection of creeds and confessions which are secondary authorities, Biblicism becomes "a devotion to the Bible as the Word of God that is alone needed for all of faith, apart from creeds and confessions."

In practice therefore, we see the terrible consequences of Biblicism rear its ugly head in the early days of the Second Great Awakening, as the previous biblical truths assumed in the First Great Awakening were finally questioned and discarded in American frontier spirituality, with the acid of biblicism eating through the remaining legacy of the Reformation. The Stone-Campbell movement, named after its founders Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone, was one of the first early modern restorationist movement, whereby the wisdom of prior ages were rejected in favor of a project working towards a full-scale "restoration" of the "golden age" of the New Testament church.⁴ Barton Stone, in his "evangelical" zeal, even went to the extreme of rejecting the Trinity, or at the very least being agnostic about it.⁵ The Stone-Campbell movement, while not exactly rejecting the Trinity, is Biblicist in its approach to Scripture, thus they began by calling themselves "Christian churches," in an attempted rejection of all other denominational distinctives as being inherently schismatic.

Evangelicals may not go as far in their practice of Biblicism as Barton Stone, yet in their rejection of the authority of creeds and confessions, and their focus on just reading the Bible and ignoring the wisdom of the church, they have much in common with the Stone-Campbell restorationists, or the modern restorationists of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. As opposed to the Reformed faith whereby creeds and confessions are held in high regard as secondary authorities of the Christian faith, in Evangelicalism, they are not treated with such esteem. Evangelical churches might revere them as important historical artefacts, but they will not be treated as authorities in the church for the Christian life.

The fourth pillar, Crucicentrism, looks much more biblical, in that it makes central what is truly central to Christianity: the theme of Christ's atonement for our sins on the Cross. Yet,

⁴ Richard T. Hughes, "Introduction," in Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The American Quest for the Primitive Church* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 2. Another term for "restorationist" is "primitivist": "...I shall use this word [primitivism] in a broadly generic manner to refer to any effort to deny history, or to deny the contingences of historical existence, by returning to the time before time, to the golden age that preceded the corruptions of life in history." [Grant Wacker, "Playing for Keeps: The Primitivist Impulse in Early Pentecostalism," in *Ibid.*, 197]

⁵ D. Newell Williams, Douglas A. Foster and Paul M. Blowers, eds., *The Stone-Campbell Movement: A Global History* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2013), 11-12; David Edwin Harrell, Jr., "Restorationism and the Stone-Campbell Tradition," in Lippy and Williams, *Encyclopedia*, 847

as a distinctive of Evangelicalism, it is distinctive not for what it says but what it does not say. For if the focus is merely on the Cross of Christ, then any other doctrine is regarded as matters of secondary importance, which should not be used to divide professing believers. Just as Biblicism becomes the Bible only, so likewise Crucicentrism becomes the Cross only. The central doctrine of Christ's atonement becomes the only thing that evangelicals must hold to, while other doctrines like the doctrines of God, of Man, of election etc., become secondary.

Thus, while evangelicals might think that another evangelical is seriously wrong because he denies God's foreknowledge in holding to Open Theism for example, if he does not touch the doctrine of the atonement, he could be taken to be a brother in Christ. The idea that the doctrine of the atonement should be central devolved into the practice that the doctrine of the atonement alone determines whether someone is or is not a Christian. In fact, to suggest that someone who has an orthodox doctrine of the atonement, yet who deny key doctrines of the faith like predestination, election, or God's exhaustive foreknowledge, is not a Christian is probably regarded as one of the worst sins in Evangelicalism. "How dare you judge the salvation of a brother based upon his theological foibles! How can you claim that a person is saved by his theological knowledge and not just by faith alone?!" Such clichéd rhetoric masks the reality that Evangelicalism has a certain view of the Christian life that is contrary to the view of the Reformation and, in my opinion, the biblical view. Crucicentrism has become "a focus on Jesus Christ and the substitutionary atonement of Christ for sins as the sole determiner for someone being a believer."

Instead of the confessionalism of the Reformed churches, where the creeds and confessions summarize the important biblical doctrines, while allowing for differences in theology in what it does not cover, Evangelicalism with its focus on the atonement allows false teachers and believers to be in the church under the guise of "Christian unity." That is why it is virtually impossible for Evangelicalism to actually kick someone out of the movement, although one could certainly try despite a lack of a theological basis for doing so. While Evangelical churches can engage in theological trials and excommunicate a false teacher, their rationale for doing so contradicts their crucicentrism. For how can someone claim that the vast doctrinal differences between sides like Confessional Presbyterianism and Word-Faith G12 Charismatic churches are irrelevant for the purpose of Christian unity, while condemning the Open Theist who attends a conservative Wesleyan church? Upon what basis is Word-faith deemed to be within the bounds of orthodoxy while Open Theism is considered beyond the pale? Or upon what basis do Evangelical leaders give a free pass to Sabellian heretic T.D. Jakes, while rejecting Jehovah's Witness as a cult? Is Sabellianism tolerable for an orthodox Christian but not Arianism?

As we look at the Bebbington Quadrilateral, we notice that the four pillars of Evangelicalism has to be amended to reflect the practical expression of Evangelicalism socially and historically. Evangelicalism can therefore be defined by these four characteristics:

1. Conversionism: a focus on the necessity of each person to individually turn to Christ in faith for salvation, with the necessity of a recollection of a personal conscious experience in doing so
2. Activism: a commitment to participate with God in doing good according to the world's current social notions of doing good, and to witness for God in a way that seems right
3. Biblicism: a devotion to the Bible as the Word of God that is alone needed for all of faith, apart from creeds and confessions
4. Crucicentrism: a focus on Jesus Christ and the substitutionary atonement of Christ for sins as the sole determiner for someone being a believer

Defining Reformed

What on the other hand is “Reformed”? What is a Reformed Church? Just because a church was in times past a Reformed church should not mean that it still is a Reformed church, for churches can change over time. Therefore, historical lineage should play no part in determining who or what is or is not Reformed. The short definition is that “Reformed” implies that the person and church self-consciously identify with the Reformation and the Reformed party during the Reformation. Specifically, to be Reformed is to identify with the beliefs and piety of the Reformed Christians and churches of the Reformation, and her principle identification documents are to be the historic creeds and the Reformed Confessions.

Therefore, to be Reformed is to be “confessional,” that is, to hold to and subscribe to one of the Reformed confessions as expressing the truths taught by Scripture. The Reformed confessions do not stand in isolation however, and thus the Reformed tradition comes with certain teachings on liturgy and piety as well. The Westminster Standards for example come with an attached Directory for Public Worship, circumscribing how worship is to be done in the Presbyterian churches of its time. From their beginnings, the Reformed churches have always focused on right worship and right order, drawing up books of church order and writing up procedure for the government of the church. The Reformed distinctives can thus be said to consist of the following:

1. Confessional: Subscription to (at least) one of the Reformed confessions
2. Orthodox: Holding to the five Solas and the five points of Calvinism, as well as the system of doctrine in the Reformed confessions, as definitive of the Christian faith
3. Reverence: A desire for true worship of the one true God
4. Orderly: A desire for right order and following of right procedure in the church

Those who are Reformed must subscribe to at least one of the Reformed confessions. Such a subscription is a knowledgeable one, not blindly putting one's name on a document one has hardly read. Rather, the person has to read the entire confession and agree with what it says, for the most part. One can surely quibble about minutiae, but

besides that, there should be no disagreement with propositions of the Reformed confession(s).

Reformed people ought to be orthodox. That means that the confessional subscription results in actual belief in one's heart and mind that these propositions are truth. The five Solas are a summary of the main points of the Reformation and are thus found throughout the Reformed confessions, and the five points of Calvinism are merely a simplified summary of the Canons of Dordt. Therefore, Reformed people ought to be orthodox in true belief of these doctrines, not as merely what one needs to assent to with his mouth, but what he needs to truly and firmly believe as absolutely true with confidence in both the mouth and the heart.

Reverence implies a heart attitude of obedience in serving and worshipping God. Before Lev. 10:1-2 was used as a proof text for the Regulative Principle of Worship, its immediate context is that of religious service to God. Therefore, in both worship and service, one has to do so in obedience to God's Word. In worship, the Regulative Principle holds true so one must worship God only in the way God has told us to do so. The Reformed person therefore must reject most of "contemporary worship," as well as contemporary theories on how worship is or is not to be done, which often devolves into pragmatic arguments for how to "get the people in." In service, the Reformed person understands that he can only serve if God calls him to serve, and only in the way God wants him to serve. Serving God is not a right. God does not need anyone's service! One should not ask how one can serve God, but rather, "What does God want me to do?" If God does not call, do not serve. Wrong service, as with wrong worship, is sin. You can "serve God," but in the end, you might incur even greater sin. Do not presume to serve God unless God has called you to serve Him.

Lastly, orderly implies that what is most important for a Reformed person is that the church he attends (after getting the Gospel and the Christian faith right), is committed to being orderly for the glory of God (c.f. 1 Cor. 14:33). We are not just spirits, but body and soul. So likewise, the church is not just some spiritual amorphous "gathering" of people, but an instituted assembly gathered together to worship God. Just as wrong worship displeases God, so likewise a lack of right order displeases him, as right order in the church is part of the worship and service of God.

Contrasting Reformed from Evangelical Piety: The Priority Aspects

"Which comes first: the chicken or the egg?" Most of the time, such questions are meant to indicate that two causal issues are so intricately related that it is impossible to tell which comes before the other. However, in the realm of logic, which comes first speaks of which one has priority over the other, which one is preeminent or superior to the other.

Thus, when it comes to theory and practice, which is more important? More specifically, is knowing the focus of one's piety, or is experiencing the focus of one's piety? Surely, both are necessary, but which one is prior to the other?

In Evangelicalism, experiencing has the priority in one's piety. We have noted that the conversion experience is a distinctive of Evangelicalism. This turn to the subjective is even more pronounced when coupled with the current postmodern turn in society. Evangelical Christianity is privatized into a religious experience, whereby the focus is on a person getting right with God. Christ is the salve of the soul, to calm the conscience from the guilt of sin.

In Reformed Christianity however, knowing has the priority in one's piety. The focus is on confessing the faith, partaking of the sacraments, and worshiping according to the Regulative Principle. The focus is on the public profession of one's faith before others, on joining the external administration of the covenant of God. Christ is the truth, and therefore He can be trusted no matter what one sees or how one feels. Do you need to feel that gravity is real to know it is real? Of course not. Likewise, because one knows that God is God and Christ is the Savior, Christianity is true as a fact, regardless of how one feels.

This difference in prioritizing knowing and experiencing orientates the Christian's life differently. In Evangelicalism, the focus is on experiencing Christ. Christ must be felt to actually calm the soul. Preaching aims for the emotions, even when biblical truth is being truly preached. That is why "application" is so much focused on, since the type of application aimed for are those that touch the hearts of its hearers, that "speak to their situation." Even when the content of the preaching is the Gospel, and the religion being preached is not Moral Therapeutic Deism, the therapeutic element is still present, in the focus on "application."

In Reformed thought, the focus is on knowing God. Preaching tends to be more cerebral, showing forth the sense of the text and how they link to each other to show forth God's truth. This focus is seen especially in catechetical sermons, where the focus is on understanding the catechism answers, with some application as an aside where time permits.

Such of course is not to claim that Evangelicalism has no room for knowing God, or that Reformed piety has no heart, but rather which aspect holds priority in their respective pieties. What is prioritized will cascade down in how one lives out the Christian life, in his respective practices of piety, as it can be seen in the various practices below

Contrasting Reformed from Evangelical Piety: Views on Bible and Tradition

As we have seen in the discussion of Bebbington's third pillar of Biblicism, Evangelicalism tends towards a rejection of creeds and confessions as standards in the church. This does not mean that they think they are taken to be always unimportant, but the creeds

and confessions, the Reformed tradition as a whole, is rejected as in any way authoritative for the church.

In practice, what this translates to is that the Christian creeds and confessions are not treated with appropriate respect. Since the Bible only is important, therefore subscription to the creeds and confessions may either be done away with, or watered down to some form of “good faith subscription” such that one can “subscribe” to the “spirit” of the creed while ignoring its letter. This has consequences in evangelical churches whereby error is not as easily dealt with, if at all. One only has to look at the state of the churches and the various controversies within Evangelicalism to validate that fact. When Evangelicalism in America has attempted to stem heresy, big conferences such as the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy were held and the subsequent statements such as the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) were written and signed. While those are objectively good for the church, yet they have no *powers of imposition* on any evangelical church except what that church allows it to have. Any professing evangelical church can call itself “evangelical” and choose to disregard the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978), or the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (1988), or the Nashville Statement (2017) which speaks to the issue of gender confusion and deviance. Besides the obvious organization limitation in dealing with error, what Biblicism has contributed to the failure to remove error is the lack of any real authority which these documents possess, besides the social pressure from having many big-name Evangelicals sign those statements (and even this social pressure is vitiated by creating a counter-document signed by other big-name Evangelicals). Evangelicalism, as a movement, has no real power to stem error, and thus it has become more and more of a big tent where heresy is tolerated.

In one’s personal life, Reformed piety is marked by fidelity to the Creeds and Confessions one subscribes to. The Bible is revered as the ultimate authority, and read for spiritual nourishment and edification. But the Creeds and Confessions are taken to be authoritative for teaching and meditating on biblical truth. They can be used in devotions, especially family devotions, as summaries of what the Bible teaches. They are not just historical documents to be displayed, but living traditions that are taught to the congregation and meditated upon regularly.

Therefore, in a Reformed church, we do not talk about Bible study alone, although we do study the Bible. **We also study our confessional documents, and engage in other forms of study** (e.g. biblical theology, church history, systematic theology) of the matter and form of what God has revealed to us and what we have systematized from His revelation, the “pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13). Evangelical piety focuses just on the Bible, a practice which can and does produce the errors of Biblicism. If an Evangelical Bible study becomes in-depth, it could produce the illusion that the Bible is really studied, but whether the underlying axioms are true or not is unknown. For what is stated as a mere Bible study might smuggle in Dispensational presuppositions for example in a study

on the book of Revelations, and those without knowledge of these presuppositions might not be able to discern the boundary where the Bible ends and human speculation begins.

Lastly, a rejection of Biblicism would provide more stability to one's faith, since the Creeds and Confessions will form the backbone of one's knowledge of the faith. While it is true that Evangelicals can have an idea of what truths are essential, without creeds and confessions to fall back on, they are more susceptible to shift their positions when "new scholarship" arrive. Of course, personal susceptibility depends on one's spiritual health, so it is possible for an Evangelical to be more subjectively grounded in biblical truth than someone who professed to be Reformed. Nevertheless, intellectually, the creeds and confessions provide some measure of external objective stability, which is helpful for believers so that they can immediately see what the Reformed church they attend holds to be true, and then build their faith using the Creeds and Confessions as spiritual aids.

Contrasting Reformed from Evangelical Piety: Views on the Means of Grace

In Reformed theology, the phrase "Means of Grace" is used to describe the practices wherein God gives believers His grace. Part of our reverence towards God lies in realizing that we cannot demand grace. God is gracious to us only in where He has told us He is gracious towards us. This is in stark contrast to Evangelical piety whereby it is assumed that anything and everything we do for God is acceptable, as long as it does not violate the Scriptures and we are doing it sincerely (the normative principle). However, if in the Reformed view we realize that God can break out in wrath against His people, as He did so again and again towards the Old Testament Church, then we must approach God only in the way He calls us to. Sincerity is no defence against God, in the same way that Nadab and Abihu were sincerely offering unauthorized fire before God (Lev. 10:1), yet God's wrath nevertheless broke out against them.

The means of grace wherein God meets us in His grace are the preaching of the Word, the sacraments properly administered, and prayer (WSC Q88). These, and only these, are the activities Christians should practice to encounter God, to meet God in the "place" He has ordained.

In practice, this means that Reformed Christians should make every effort to attend to the public preaching of the Word of God, the administering of the sacraments, which for believers most of the time is the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper (which John Calvin wanted to celebrate weekly), and in prayer, especially public prayer. Whereas in Evangelical piety the focus is on one's personal "Quiet Time" or personal devotion where one typically reads a passage of Scripture and pray to God to start the day, and then in worship and studying the Bible, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship, in Reformed piety all these activities are oriented differently. Personal devotion is secondary in importance to attending the Lord's Day worship service. Fellowship happens but there is nothing special to it. Evangelism is not a special event and more an ordinary occurrence by saints who testify for our Lord wherever possible.

One area whereby Evangelical piety differ a lot from Reformed piety is in the area of discipleship. Much of evangelicalism have been affected by the Wesleyan and Keswick idea of a deeper life, and thus discipleship is focused on a personal one-to-one or one-to-many mentoring of another person(s). Since it is impossible for the pastor(s) of a church to disciple every single person in the church, lay leaders such as cell group leaders are meant to take the place of the pastor in pastoring their own small flocks. In fact, that is the basic rationale for cell groups in the first place. Depending on the church model of discipleship, this discipleship process can take on various forms. On the more extreme end are the Charismatic Shepherding Movement and its descendants like the G12 model, which arrange the church in a hierarchical discipleship network so that many people are simultaneously disciplined by someone more senior than them, and discipling others more junior than them.⁶ Other more moderate models focus the shepherding tasks on the cell leaders alone, who are to be seen as lay leaders who are trained by the church leadership for their tasks.

In Reformed piety however, discipleship is primarily the task of the pastor and the elders. The pastor have to know his flock, pray for them, counsel them where necessary and set an example for them in life and doctrine. The pastor is not a personal mentor to anyone except only those seeking the ministry (licentiates and pastoral interns), and therefore he does not have to do the kind of intensely personal mentoring the “shepherds” in the Shepherding movement might do, otherwise he would have no time to do any of his other duties. The pastor is to get to know the flock through visitations and meetups. He listens, counsels, prays, and offers encouragement from the Bible, but he is not strictly a counselor and not a social worker. Discipleship is done by the pastor, AND the Holy Spirit working through the pastor in visitation and through the preaching of the Word every Lord’s Day. It is natural, for those steeped in Evangelical piety of intense personal discipleship, to not be happy with the comparatively little attention Reformed pastors might give to their congregations. They might prefer to have the pastor hear their problems every week. But pastors are humans too, with the same time limitation of 24 hours per day, with a family to take care of, and they are not your BFF (Unless your pastor is really your BFF).

Reformed discipleship lies primarily in listening to the teaching and preaching of the Word on the Lord’s Day, attending to the catechetical instruction and bible studies on that day (where possible), in which the Holy Spirit disciplines you, through the public ministry of the Word. Reformed discipleship then lies secondarily in the pastor visiting you on a regular basis (not necessarily weekly), where in the formal visitation he enquires into your spiritual state, share with you from God’s Word, pray for you and perhaps inform you of avenues of help. And that’s it! The Reformed pastor is not your problem solver for every single problem you might face. If he is not trained in accountancy, it might not be a good idea to ask your pastor to help you balance your finances. The Reformed pastor is not a trained

⁶ S. David Moore, *The Shepherding Movement: Controversy and Charismatic Ecclesiology* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2003), 55-6, 60, 73-8

counselor along the lines of what the world expect of counselors. The Reformed pastor's counseling is purely on spiritual issues and the worldly consequences of sin, not on anything not covered in Scripture. If you want a counselor to take care of your emotional chaos, unless there is sin involved, the Reformed pastor might not be who you want to find; go find a secular counselor for that!

Re-orienting the Christian life around the means of grace, as opposed to Evangelical "disciplines," orientates the Reformed Christian towards what God has done for us in Christ, as opposed to what we are to do for God. It is not just the message from the pulpit that is important, but even the way we live out our Christian lives are to reflect a message of grace, not of the works of the law.

Contrasting Reformed from Evangelical Piety: Views on the Church

It goes without saying that, if one were to focus on the Means of Grace, then the public Lord's Day service is vital to Reformed piety. Together with the need to be orderly, this means firstly that the Church as an institution is important. In the Reformed view, the Church is an institution as much as it is an organism. God ordains the offices of elders and deacons for His church (Eph. 4:11, 1 Tim. 3:1-13, Tit. 1: 6-9), decreeing the exact manner he desires His church to run. Presbyterian Church government therefore is by divine right (*de jure divino*), since God has decreed that His church should be ordered in that way. This does not mean that other churches using other models are not churches, just that they are sinning in not obeying God on this matter.

This focus on the institutional church and a specific form of government is part of Reformed piety. In contrast, Evangelical piety downplay the institutional aspect of the church while over-elevating the church-as-organism aspect. Evangelical piety is individualistic, focusing on Quiet Times and bible studies. Reformed piety is however not collectivistic (the direct opposite of individualism), but covenantal. The focus of Reformed piety is in the fact that God has instituted an entity the Church, which is a covenantal creature. The Church is not focused on group identity (collectivistic), or the individuals in the church (individualistic), but on God who decreed the church into existence (covenantal) (c.f. Mt. 16:18, Rev. 12:1-6). What does this mean in practice? It means that Reformed Christians join the church not for self-fulfillment or moral duty (individualistic), or to be part of a loving community (collectivistic), but because they are Christians called by God in faith, with an emphasis on "*calling*" (covenantal). They come to church and join as members, because God is, period. There needs be no benefits to church membership for a person to join a church. In fact, during times of persecution, there would be serious disadvantages to being a church member!

With regards to church membership, those with an evangelical background come to the question asking all the wrong questions. The question for church membership should not primarily be "What are the biblical reasons why I should join a church as a member," but "Am I a Christian who confess the name of Christ." For there is nowhere in the Bible that

any of the apostles believe that one can be a “secret Christian,” or a Christian whose membership is only found in the invisible church. We of course acknowledge that there might be Christians who are not members of the visible church, because faith in Christ, not church membership, saves. But that is not the point here. The point here is that all the apostles assume that the *normal, natural* course of a believer is to be a member of a visible church. We are not to focus on the possible irregular person who is saved and yet was not a church member, for the exception never overturns the rule. In the life of a believer, the question to be asked is whether one has trusted in Christ for salvation. Then one has to join the church as a member. As the church father Cyprian once said, “There is no salvation outside the church” (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), by which he meant the visible institutional church, and which is re-stated with qualifiers in the Westminster Confession as follows:

The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, *out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.* (WCF 25.2. Emphasis added)

Reformed piety shifts the question on church and church membership back to God and His covenant, not on Man and the association of individual believers. And this in turn shifts the question of ministry and service back to the institutional church, which brings us to the second point on the church.

In Evangelicalism, parachurch organizations have multiplied and proliferated. Whether because of the failure of the institutional churches or some other reasons, these parachurch organization have stepped up to do the work that, it seems, the churches have failed to do. While officially the parachurch organizations are to come alongside (“para-“) the church, in practice they sometimes overshadow the church in ministry. The rise in parachurch organizations come about due to the Evangelical view of church which denigrates its institutional aspects. Now, Reformed piety does acknowledge the need for more specialized ministries for some ministry work like translation. But the difference here is in a Reformed ecclesiology, all ministry workers, or even the entire agency, are to be called and held accountable by the churches, not a bunch of business laypeople in a board of directors for example.

In all of these, Reformed piety is church-oriented, as opposed to spirituality-oriented. The focus of Reformed Christians is first and foremost the institutional church wherein God works out His benefit and grace to us, as opposed to the Evangelical mindset wherein the focus is just on one’s personal relationship to God. The Reformed Christian is focused on the covenantal call of God, not God as merely his own individual savior.

Contrasting Reformed from Evangelical Piety: Views on the Moral Law and especially the Fourth Commandment

Concerning the Law of God, it is clear in the Reformed tradition that the moral law is 'summarily comprehended' in the Ten Commandments (e.g. WSC Q41). The Ten Commandments are thus seen as a summary of God's moral law to mankind. While noting that the Ten Commandments are given to Israel, Israel is the Old Testament Church so it is binding on Christians too. But more generally, these ten words are restated throughout the Old and New Testaments as applied to Israel and the nations. After all, the prohibition of idolatry applies to other nations as well — just because God did not punish them immediately does not imply that God is fine with their idolatry (c.f. Acts 17:30). And God routinely punishes the nations for violence and injustice, which are violations of the second table of the Law. Thus, the moral law, indicating God's nature, is the law applicable to the world, condemning the world as it continually violates that law.

There is no one view of the moral law in Evangelicalism, as it spans diverse traditions not all of which continue to hold on to the Reformation teaching on the moral law. Generally, most of Evangelicalism (but not all) hold to some form of moral law and see the Ten Commandments as an expression of the Law of God, at least in theory. But what is seen in modern-day practice is a neglect of the Fourth Commandment. Evangelicals generally do not see the Lord's Day as a Sabbath to the Lord, to be kept holy unto Him. Sundays are not seen to be a special day to worship God, as services are done on other days like Saturdays. The corporate worship is not treasured in much of modern-day Evangelicalism. Work on Sundays is not treated as a sin, and here we are not speaking of works that are necessary to be done. It might be necessary for some work to be done on Sundays, but only the bare minimum should be done, as the focus should be on the sanctifying of the Lord's Day.

The focus of the fourth commandment is to be on our use of that day, in how we are to focus our attention on resting in God, throughout that day. It is possible to "observe the Sabbath" in action but not in the heart. The Sabbath rest was given for Man's benefit (Mk. 2:27). Firstly, it refreshes us for the day ahead, as the Christian Sabbath is on the first day of the work-week. Secondly, it reminds us of the eternal rest that Jesus has purchased for us, of which this rest is merely the sign (Deut. 5:15; Heb. 4:9-10). Thus, the fourth commandment is a weekly reminder to us that God is the God of time. We are thus to observe the Lord's Day in obedience to and submission to our God.

Reformed piety, as with much of traditional Christian piety, takes the Fourth Commandment seriously. Evangelical piety, while not necessarily against the keeping of the Fourth Commandment, does not place the same amount of importance and emphasis on this vital duty. The focus of Evangelical piety has always been one's personal devotions in one's Quiet times before God, with the inner life taking front and center stage over one's public devotion. Reformed piety calls for observing the Christian Sabbath, beginning with attending the worship service and continuing with individual believers ordering their other activities of that day around the theme of God's rest. Without prescribing a certain specific manner of Sabbath observance as the only way to observe

it, Reformed piety focuses on the sanctity of that day, and calls for obedience to God's command on this matter.

Contrasting Reformed from Evangelical Piety: Views on Worship

The last contrast between Reformed and Evangelical piety lies in one's views and practice of worship. As was previously stated, one major distinctive of all confessional Reformed churches is the belief and practice in the Regulative Principle of Worship, where only what is commanded can be practiced in worship. This is opposed to the normative principle of worship practiced in Evangelicalism in general, whereby as long as something is not prohibited, it can be done in worship. The primary proof-text for the Regulative Principle of Worship is Leviticus 10:1-2, where Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. God did not deem their sacrifice to be acceptable to him, as He did not order it, so it was rejected.

Holding to the Regulative Principle of Worship means that Reformed Christians worship God with godly fear and reverence. God is still God and we cannot just worship Him in whatever way we please. God does not need to accept our worship, and so we keep to what God has commanded and do not seek innovation. Reformed Christians will reject the modern innovations of drama and dance in worship, or the additions of any element not commanded in Scripture. If push comes to shove, they would rather be "irrelevant" and "outdated" than to be seen as "cool" yet in disobedience to God.

Worship is done primarily in the covenant meeting with God in the Lord's Day service. While there is indeed a broader sense of "worship" as the offering of oneself as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), Reformed piety emphasizes the covenant meeting on the Lord's Day. This is opposed to modern Evangelical piety which focuses on the broader sense of "worship" while downplaying the importance of the actual Lord's Day service.

Lastly, in broad Evangelicalism, worship is more of an experience, to experience God. This focus on experiencing stems from the priority of experience in Evangelical piety. Reformed Christians on the other hand focus on meeting God covenantally in worship. While feelings and emotions are not totally unimportant, they should not be its focus. Reverent worship does evoke godly emotions, but they are the fruit of worship not its goal. For those coming from an evangelical background, it is not surprising if Reformed worship does not come across as being "vibrant," for Reformed worship is not about one's personal experience of being "close to God" but about conveying to God what He is due from us His creatures.

When it comes to disputes on worship and especially the singing, the difference between Reformed and Evangelical piety manifests itself in the types of questions being asked. If questions are asked about connecting to people and about people wanting to copy the vibrant style of the other church just down the street, or about desiring to play this popular "worship song," then Evangelical piety concerning worship is at play here. Reformed

worship is more concerned with intelligibility of the words and phrases of the lyrics in the songs, and of what message is conveyed in the musical style of the song, then its appropriateness to the part of the liturgy it is to be sung in and the sermon of the day. It is not just what songs are being used, but why a certain song is used. Two churches can sing “Amazing Grace,” but the reasons for adopting that hymn is different between a Reformed church and an Evangelical church — the former with a desire to use the biblical lyrics to praise God’s grace, while the latter because it is a familiar song to praise God’s grace. Due to the difference in the questions asked, generally churches who practice Reformed piety tend to use less contemporary songs, and will even sing the older metrical Psalms, while churches who practice Evangelical piety will tend to use more contemporary songs and use hymns set to more contemporary tunes and rhythm. It can almost be said in general that, since the older tunes and rhythm are still aesthetically beautiful, those who tend towards choosing the new versions of hymns that have been “Chris Tomlin-fied” are those with a more evangelical style of piety on the issue of worship.

Conclusion

Reformed piety stems from Reformed theology, while Evangelical piety stems from the social settings of Evangelicalism. The distinctives of being Reformed is to be confessional, orthodox, reverent and orderly, while the distinctives of being Evangelical is to be conversionist, activist, Biblicist, and crucicentrist. Due to Reformed churches emerging in an era of confessional strife, and promoted by professors and theologians, Reformed piety is the worked-out application of Reformed theology by these intellectual giants in the church. In contrast, Evangelical piety stems from the social settings out of which Evangelicalism emerged and advanced in its own way. That the priority aspect of Reformed piety is knowing while the priority aspect of Evangelical piety is experiencing lies very much at the geneses of these two movements — the Reformed church in its controversy with Tridentine Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism, and the Evangelical movement in its perceived rejuvenation of a living faith in the midst of a dead formalism (real and perceived). Both pieties are a necessary consequence of the historical events and epochs in which they have emerged, and make sense within their internal frames of reference.

That said, the two types of pieties are not the same. And while there might be legitimate reasons why Evangelical piety has developed the way it has historically, the question that we face, after differentiating the two types of piety, is whether either piety is biblical. In the course of this article, it can be seen where Evangelical piety fall short of what the Scriptures command us to do, while Reformed piety is more in line with Scripture. The failure of Evangelical piety has to do with how the founders of Evangelicalism failed to correctly read the problems they had faced in the churches, mistaking false doctrine (Laudian latitudinarianism) for dead orthodoxy in the Church of England of their time for example.

Reformed and Evangelical pieties are different, and through this article, we can see that Evangelical piety has been found wanting. Let us therefore reject that piety for one that is truer to Scripture, for in right doctrine and the right application of that doctrine do we see life in God. Amen.

For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light. (Ps. 36:9)